

## seedlings search for light by kawuli

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**Summary:**

*Eleven always knew what she was for.*

A game, a test, a toy, a tool, a child, a weapon.

## seedlings search for light

Eleven always knew what she was for.

She thinks there were others. Before, when they pretended it was a game, when they'd take her to a room, tell her she could have all the candy she wanted if she could get it off the shelf.

Not by climbing. By thinking.

There were others, then. She heard them, sometimes. She asked Papa, once, if she could meet them. If they could play together.

He just looked at her like she'd done something terrible, and walked out.

She hasn't heard any of the others in a long time.

And it isn't a game anymore.

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First there's the wires. Tests, in the room with the big window. Lift, throw, crush, small things and then bigger, easy and then harder. Eleven can feel something inside her, buzzing and burning, collecting and bursting, and at first, for small things, it feels good. She can do it, and the men behind the window nod and write things down and Papa looks pleased, and she did it right and it feels good.

But it gets harder. Eleven reaches for the buzzing burning humming becomes screeching searing and when it bursts out and crushes the can on the table Eleven wonders if her whole head might be crushed with it. Papa nods, she did good, she's good, so why does she feel so bad?

He comes to see her. "You did very well," he says. "I know it's hard," he says. "You are very strong, this is so important, I want you to keep trying your very hardest."

“Yes,” Eleven says. Means yes it's hard and yes I'm trying and don't be mad and I don't want to anymore. But that's so many words, only Papa has so many words to use. Not Eleven, not the people who come bring her food or medicine or come take her to do more tests or look into her ears and nose and eyes and poke needles in to take blood out or put something else in. They use words like come here and sit down and don't move and give me your arm and put this on and (if she isn't quick enough) do you want Papa to get mad?

Papa gets the rest of the words. It doesn't leave very many for Eleven to use, but she doesn't need them.

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Then Papa tells her to do something new.

It starts the same. Move a mouse, across the table. Easier than crushing a can, but somewhere skittering a whisper that might be fear, and that doesn't come from her. The mouse squeaks, huddles as far from her as it can get, goes very still.

(Eleven, huddled in the corner of her room because she did it wrong and Papa is mad and it's the closest she can come to disappearing.)

She stares at the mouse until Papa taps the glass. He's watching her, not mad yet but on the way there. The mouse is shivering, whiskers twitching, but she slides it across the table anyway. Left to right, and then, when Papa looks at her again, right to left. It isn't hard, except for that skittering whisper growing to a shriek and disappearing, leaving an echo in Eleven's mind.

Then Papa tells her to throw it. Against the wall. It's small and soft and the walls are hard and white and when she throws bottles they shatter. Eleven looks at the mouse, looks at Papa frowning, looks at the mouse, reaches out, feels the buzzing-burning, the terrified shriek she's not hearing with her ears, and— she can't. She can't.

The men come in, take her to the empty room while Papa watches,

eyebrows pulled together, frowning, mad. Mad, mad mad, because she didn't do it right, she was bad, she should always do what she's told but she didn't she couldn't she wouldn't she *wouldn't*.

And then the door opens, a box is set inside, closed. She can hear squeaking. More mice.

She's hungry. Tired. Hungry. They should bring her a meal now, but they don't. She was bad, and this is her punishment. No meal. But. Why mice?

It's later. The door opens. Someone sets a plate of food on the floor, opens the box. Closes the door.

The mice race towards the plate of food, her food, she's hungry it's hers not theirs they can't have it it's hers, hers hers hers *hers*.

"No," she yells. Loud, echoes, angry.

Angry. Angry makes it easier, means when she reaches the buzzing burning slides easily in, means the little shrieking threads of fear snap and burst when she pushes out, flings all of them away, away from her food, against hard cold walls and hers hers hers hers hers they can't have it it's *hers*.

She grabs the plate and scoots back against the wall, starts eating with her ears still ringing head still throbbing, finishes all of it sets the plate down and—

Blood. Small soft furry bodies lying against the walls where she—she—she—

But they shouldn't have taken her food. But she hurt them, but she didn't want to hurt them but it's hers not theirs but they didn't understand but they're hungry too but she was so angry but Papa will say she did good but it doesn't feel like good. Doesn't feel like good at all. Someone comes in with a brush and a rag and puts the tiny furry bodies in a bag and wipes away the blood and he doesn't look at Eleven, curled against the back wall, he looks at the floor and the walls and sometimes quick secret scared looks not quite at her but almost and—

They're scared. Of her? Of her. There's nothing else in here. Just Eleven. Eleven and the mice bodies in a bag and the blood and the empty plate.

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She can't do it if she isn't angry. They try to make her, they show her a cat and it hisses at her like it knows what she's doing. She looks at it, tries to focus, tries to be angry even, but it's just a cat and it's in a cage (a room, a facility) and she has no reason to hurt it and she can't she won't she has to but she won't she can't she won't.

Papa's face goes hard and the men come in and grab her, and it hurts and they're taking her down the wrong hallway it's not back to her room it's to the other room, with no lights no windows no sound no nothing and they're going to *leave* her in there all by herself and last time they left her there until she wet herself and she doesn't know how long it was but it was too long and she won't can't will not let them do that again. So before they can close the door she reaches for the buzzing screaming burning angry and one man flies back against the wall and the other is looking at her, and he's the mean one who tries to pinch her, gets too close, looks at her like she's something good to eat, except now he just looks scared. Eleven likes that he's scared, wants him to hurt like he hurts her, twists her head and crack and down he goes and— oh.

Oh no. She didn't mean to...except she did, sort of, she wanted to hurt them but she thinks they're *dead* and it's just like the mice she didn't mean to they shouldn't have hurt her she shouldn't have killed them she doesn't even know how she did it not really she—

Papa steps into the room. Looks at the man on the floor, the man slumped against the wall, looks at Eleven. He's happy. She did good. She did good? He's touching her, picking her up, holding her, that means she did good, but she feels like she did something bad, but Papa is acting like it wasn't bad at all, like she never disobeyed with the cat, like doing that to the men makes up for everything else, and she wants Papa to stay and touch her and hold her but she doesn't

want to do that again she hurts all over and her head feels wrong and nothing makes sense. But Papa puts her to bed and brings her ice cream and tells her to rest and puts a hand to her cheek before he goes out. Eleven can feel the warmth of his palm for a long time after he leaves.

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Words. Words are harder than hurting but they don't leave her mixed-up and twisted around inside so it's better. She's only ever done this with Papa, nursery rhymes and silly stories, a game they played where he told the story in the other room and she listened without using her ears and then Papa came back and she told him what he said.

This time they just show her a picture. Just a picture, and he's somewhere nearby but she doesn't know where and it takes everything she can do to send the words to Papa—she hears, faintly, the sound echoing scratchy from the speaker, shuts that out and listens harder to the words that she doesn't hear at all.

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Then they bring her to the tank. The tank, they say, will help her listen better. They give her something new to wear, heavy and scratchy, they put the wires on her head, they have her stand on a platform and lower her into the water. It's warm, almost like a bath, but...solid, somehow, leaving her halfway between floating and sinking. The helmet is filled with air, coming in from a tube at the back, and the only sound, the only feeling, is the bubbles that drift up occasionally until they break on the surface.

Then they close the door and it's dark. Dark like the room where they send her for being bad. Dark like everything else stopped existing. Dark. Warm. Quiet. Nothing, to her every-day senses. She's scared,

but Papa wants her to try, so she carefully reaches out with her mind, looks for Papa, sees him standing, far-off, alone, talking to nobody she can see.

She walks toward him, bare feet splashing in the water, and studies him. She can't do that with her every-day senses. He doesn't stay long enough. Here she can walk around him, look at his grey suit, his hands, his hair, his face. She listens, and he's talking, and she doesn't know where the speakers are but she thinks she's telling Papa what he's saying, repeating everything back to him through the speakers that must be in the room somewhere, and then she knows, because here in the dark place Papa smiles.

"That's very good, Eleven, we can stop for today," Papa says, in the dark place, and then the dark place disappears as the tank's door opens and light rushes in and hurts her eyes. They raise the platform until she's standing shivering in the room, so tired she can barely stand. A man picks her up—not Papa, but not one of the mean ones—carries her to her own room, takes off the wet bath-suit and replaces it with a regular gown. She's too tired even to eat, just curls up on the bed and sleeps.

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Eleven is for Papa to use. To make history, he said. To make contact, he said. But now she touched the monster, and now the monster is coming. Is here. Her platform rises out of the water, too slow too slow too slow and everyone is screaming and running and Eleven runs too and—

### **Author's Note:**

If Eleven doesn't get to be adopted and protected and *safe* in Season 2 I am going to be very upset.